

VZCZCXRO8228
RR RUEHBI RUEHCI
DE RUEHCG #0898/01 1291148
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 091148Z MAY 06
FM AMCONSUL CHENNAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8217
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1645
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1207
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0510
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1030
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0955
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0099
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0046
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0154
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0039
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0091
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4757
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0504
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENNAI 000898

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [IN](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKAN TAMIL REFUGEES AGAIN ARRIVING IN
SOUTH INDIA

REF: (A) CHENNAI 0867, (B) CHENNAI 0103

¶1. SUMMARY: (SBU) Tamil refugee leader Chandrahasan has reported to Post and Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN) officials have confirmed that on May 6, a renewed flow of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka to south India began after a hiatus of four months. The flow at this point is light but may increase if conditions continue to worsen in Sri Lanka. GoTN officials say they are ready to handle the new arrivals in existing refugee camps in Tamil Nadu. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On May 3, 2006, Post met with S. C. Chandrahasan, a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee who now heads the NGO, Organization for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OfERR). OfERR provides services and advocacy for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, both those living in south India and those internally displaced within Sri Lanka (Ref A). During the May 3 meeting, Chandrahasan described the situation in the Trincomalee area where his organization operated an outreach center which was gutted by fire in an attack by masked men on April 12. He also noted that as of May 3, no additional Tamil refugees had left Sri Lanka to seek admission to India as refugees.

A RENEWED FLOW OF TAMIL REFUGEES TO SOUTH INDIA

¶3. (SBU) On May 8, 2006 Chandrahasan called Post to report that, over the prior weekend, Tamil refugees had again begun arriving in south India. According to Chandrahasan, the arrivals began on May 6 and on a day-by-day basis were as follows:

May 6 - 20 refugees
May 7 - 17 refugees
May 8 - 38 refugees

The first day that new refugees began to appear in numbers in Tamil Nadu was May 6, the last day of

campaigning in the hard-fought Tamil Nadu assembly elections. Chandrahasan suggested that the convergence of the two events on May 6 was not coincidental. Refugees had been postponing their departure from Sri Lanka pending the end of the campaign, during which they felt security would be unusually high to prevent their entry. The new arrivals represent the first new refugees since January 2006 when a small number of refugees landed in Tamil Nadu after a gap of four years (Ref B).

REFUGEES ARE FROM JAFFNA, TRINCOMALEE, VAVUNIYA

14. According to Chandrahasan, the newly arrived refugees are from Jaffna, Trincomalee and Vavuniya in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. Ref A reported violence in the Trincomalee area on April 12. Chandrahasan told Post that conditions are continuing to worsen with a lack of power availability now a recurring problem in Trincomalee.

TAMIL NADU REHABILITATION COMMISSIONER SAYS HE IS
READY

15. (SBU) Post spoke with Ambedkar Rajkumar, the Tamil Nadu Commissioner for Rehabilitation, who confirmed the numbers that Chandrahasan had provided and added that 21 additional refugees arrived on May 9.

CHENNAI 00000898 002 OF 002

Rajkumar would not hazard a guess as to the total number of new refugees that might ultimately arrive, noting that it would depend on conditions on the island. He said that his department, which has responsibility for Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu, is ready for the renewed flow, having anticipated their arrival based on news reports of worsening conditions in Sri Lanka.

TAMIL NADU ELECTION CAMPAIGN IGNORED THE ISSUE

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Despite the worsening situation on the ground in the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka, the condition of Sri Lankan Tamils was never an issue in the just completed election campaign for the Tamil Nadu state assembly. It was convenient for the two major parties, both of which have roots in the south Indian Dravidian movement which championed Tamil language and culture, to leave the issue alone since it did not rank high on the list of voters' concerns in Tamil Nadu and because the issue has been a delicate one since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by a Tamil terrorist in the state in 1991. A major influx of refugees, if it occurs, might force Tamil Nadu and the Government of India to face the issue head-on. END COMMENT.

HOPPER